(e) Installed Capacity of the Blanking Line of Salem Steel Plant is 3000 tonnes per annum. The consumption of coin blanks by all the four Mints put together ranges from 1600 to 1800 million pieces.

**Representation by South India Iron and Hardware Merchants Association**

4177. SHRI S. MADHAVAN: Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) whether the South India Iron and Hardware Merchants Association has made representation and demanded that the southern region should be treated on par with the other consuming regions in the matter of distribution and supplies; and

(b) if so, the action taken thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) Distribution of iron and steel was deregulated in January, 1992. However, priority continues to be given for supplies to Defence. Railways, exporters of engineering goods, small scale sector and the North-Eastern States. Requirement of other consumers are met by main producers as per their markting policy.

The allocation of steel by Development Commissioner for Iron & Steel to southern region for distribution to small scale industries was increased from 88605 tonnes in 1993-94 to 119567 tonnes in 1994-95.

Supplies of steel to different regions by the main steel producers depends on the advance booking of the customers of the respective regions. No diffrentiation is made in effecting despatch/supplies of iron and steel to different regions.

**Visit of the NMDC officers to China**

4178. SHRI GHUFRAN AZAM: Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) whether the team of officers from NMDC Limited had gone to China recently;

(b) whether the official had spent huge resources without any tangible gains;

(c) whether the decision to allow the company such high expenditure was not approved by competent authority; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a) to (d) No team of officers from NMDC Limited visited the People's Republic of China recently. However, an Indian Delegation led by Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Steel, visited the People's Republic of China from 12th February, 1995 to 17th February, 1995 after due approval of the competent authority. Chairman-cum-Managing Director, National Mineral Development Corporation Limited (NMDC was included as a member of the delegation alongwith Chairman-cum-Managing Director, Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited and Vice Chairman, Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL).

The visit promoted greater understanding between Indian and Chinese sides in the iron & steel sector and also enabled the Indian delegation to discuss the potential for export of medium grade iron ore by NMDC and iron ore pellets by KIOCL to China as well as possibility of import of coking coal from China by SAIL/RINL (Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd.). A Memorandum of Understanding was also signed between the two sides for long term technical co-operation on various aspects of the iron & steel industry.